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BACKGROUND TO  
PLANNING BOSTON'S NAVY YARD REUSE

Paper Prepared for the  
BRA-MIT Urban Dynamics Advisory Committee, Inc.  
Boston Project  
Dialogue Series on  
Planning and Development for Boston's Future

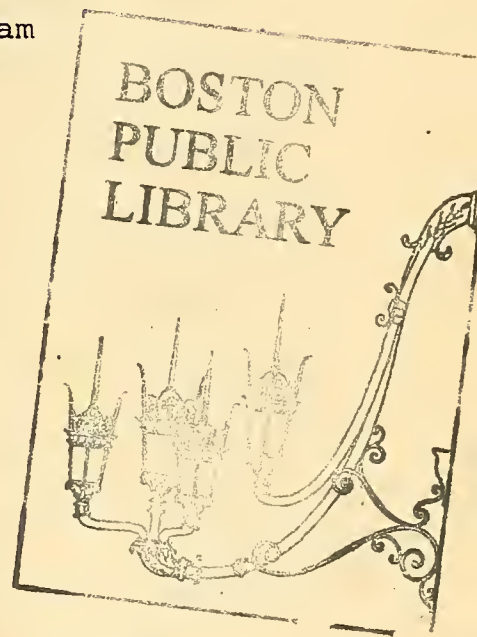
A Parkman Conference Center Program

February 1974

Kevin H. White, Mayor  
City of Boston

Robert T. Kenney, Director  
Boston Redevelopment Authority

Gerald Bush, Director  
Department of Commerce & Manpower



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## INTRODUCTION

The Charlestown Naval Base and the South Boston Naval Annex have long played a significant role in Boston's economy, providing a direct and indirect source of thousands of jobs in the area. The announcement, on April 17, 1973, of the closing of these two facilities thus posed the threat of severe economic and social repercussions in and around Boston. It also, however, provided an outstanding development opportunity - 130 acres of water rights and 220 acres of land and wharves available for reuse, the largest tract of prime land to become available in Boston in many years. Since the April announcement, a number of groups and organizations - the State Commission on Federal Base Conversion, the Boston Task Force on Base Conversion, the Boston Economic Development and Industrial Commission and the Boston Redevelopment Authority, the South Boston and Charlestown-Chelsea Advisory Committees - have been working to minimize the adverse effects of the closings and to insure that the full potential for reuse and development of the properties is realized.



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## BACKGROUND

The origins of the Boston Naval Shipyard date back to 1797 and the site itself has ties with the Revolutionary War. Situated at the foot of Breeds Hill in Charlestown on a relatively flat piece of land between the Charles River and the Mystic River estuaries, the shipyard includes "Moulton's Point", the place where the British troops landed in the Battle of Bunker Hill. In 1797, the Naval Committee of the House of Representatives recommended that an appropriation be made for the establishment of a government dockyard. Boston's natural harbor and prominence as a seaport and a shipbuilding center made it an attractive location for the facility. Benjamin Stoddard, the first Secretary of the Navy, suggested to President Adams that the Charlestown site be selected. In the summer of 1800, forty-three acres of land and mudflats were purchased and the Boston Naval Shipyard established.

In subsequent years, many famous ships were constructed at the Naval Yard including the "Independence", the "Intrepid" and the "Merrimac". The "Constitution" has been docked at the Naval Yard for all but forty years since 1803, when the

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hull was covered with copper made by Paul Revere. The shipyard has also been the site of several unique facilities - the first "shiphouse" for building ships indoors, constructed in 1813; Drydock #1, completed in 1833, one of the oldest drydocks in the nation; the 1,360 foot long ropewalk, built in 1836, which supplied all of the Navy's rope requirements for the following century.

During World War I, due to its strategic location, close to the North Atlantic, the Naval Yard was the principal center for naval ship repair work. Additional piers and buildings were constructed and the South Boston Annex was purchased from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1920. Activity at the Boston Naval Complex in the 1930's included new construction of destroyer-type vessels and repair of all types and sizes of ships.

With the advent of World War II, the Naval complex workload increased substantially. Most of the structures at the South Boston Naval Annex were built at this time and the Annex was developed into an effective adjunct to the main shipyard in Charlestown. During the war years, more





than 165 ships, 100 feet in length and over, from escorts and landing craft to large auxiliaries and submarines, were constructed at the Boston Naval Complex. In addition, hundreds of smaller craft were produced and thousands of ships repaired. The peak of new construction was reached in 1943 when eleven destroyers, forty-six destroyer escorts and three landing ship transports were completed and 887 ships repaired. Employment at the Navy Yard and Annex in this year rose to an all time high of 50,128.

Following World War II, activity and personnel at the shipyard were both reduced. The major portion of the shipyard's workload included overhauls, repairs, alterations, and conversions, in support of a program designed to offset obsolescence of World War II ships. Relatively little new construction of physical plant was undertaken and the shipyard functions were consolidated in the Charlestown Naval Yard, with the two Annex dry docks still used as part of the total production facilities. At the time of the April 17 announcement of the closing of the shipyard, 5,112 civilians were employed at the Charlestown base and 319 at the South Boston Naval Annex.



The announced closing of the Charlestown and South Boston facilities is part of a larger program of defense realignments and base closings. The April 17 announcements included 274 specific actions to consolidate, reduce, realign or close military installations intended to scale down the Defense Department's base structure in keeping with reduced force levels and training requirements. The realignments announced in April eliminated a total of 42,800 jobs throughout the country and resulted in the dislocation of 74,000 jobs (jobs lost plus jobs transferred elsewhere). The impact of the announced job actions is geographically uneven and New England was the region hit most severely. It would suffer 47 percent of the total job dislocations - 23,766 military and 11,180 civilian jobs dislocated (either eliminated or transferred out of the region) primarily in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Massachusetts would have 13,120 total jobs dislocated, including the greatest number of civilian jobs dislocated (7,154) and the second greatest number of military jobs dislocated (5,996) of any of the states affected by the April announcements.

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In the Boston area, the closing of the Naval Complex together with the closing of Chelsea Hospital and personnel reductions at Hanscom Field, also announced in April, will result in an overall net loss of 1,179 military positions and 6,221 civilian positions by December, 1974.

The actual closure schedule for the Boston Naval Shipyard called for termination of industrial operations at the shipyard by December 31, 1973, and official closing on May 31, 1974. The first reduction of workforce, after retirement of 1,622 workers in June, 1973, occurred on August 3, 1973 when 321 persons were released. At present, 1,600 people are still employed at the shipyard. These jobs will be phased out over the next few months.

#### PLANNING CONVERSION AND REUSE

The Interagency Economic Adjustment Committee, a coordinating committee of 13 Federal agencies chaired by the Secretary of Defense was established in 1970 to assist individuals and communities that suffer adverse economic impacts as a result of Defense realignment. Following the April announcements, the Committee's efforts were strengthened, its membership expanded and \$65 million proposed to aid communities in which bases are being shut

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down. Within the State, Governor Sargent set up the Joint Commission on Federal Base Conversion, under Chairman Hale Champion, to deal with problems of base closings in Massachusetts - the announced cutbacks at Otis Air Force Base and Hanscom Field, and the closure of Westover Air Force Base and Chelsea Hospital, as well as the Boston Naval Complex. The State Commission's activities have included efforts to relocate and retrain individuals whose jobs have been lost or dislocated. The State effort has been a cooperative one, working together with various groups and Task Forces in the cities involved.

In Boston, Mayor White established the Boston Task Force on Federal Base Conversion consisting of representatives from BEDIC, the BRA, South Boston and Charlestown Advisory Committees, the City of Chelsea, Massport, the Boston Shipping Association and labor. Under the lead role of the Mayor's Office of Commerce and Manpower and Director Gerald Bush, the Boston Task Force is directing conversion efforts for the facilities in the Boston area.

The Boston Base Conversion Task Force, BEDIC, the BRA, and the advisory committees have all been working to

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minimize the adverse impacts of the closings, to reduce the resulting unemployment and economic dislocation, to preserve those areas of the base which are of historical significance, to protect existing communities, and to create new jobs and tax revenues for Boston. Efforts to investigate the potential and to develop reuse proposals for the base are well underway. An inventory of existing facilities and review of prior plans and new proposals is being made and during the next few months intensive land-use and engineering studies will be conducted. These studies will formulate alternative development strategies and proposals, investigate their financial and technical feasibility and analyze each of the alternatives in terms of job creation, space and utility requirements, construction cost, transportation requirements and overall environmental impact, estimated cost of necessary public improvements and net tax benefits to the City. At the same time, developer interest is being elicited by making relevant information readily available and conducting tours of the site for interested firms and organizations.

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## REUSE PROPOSALS

While reuse potential of the sites are being studied more carefully and alternative proposals developed, community input will be sought and overall impact of various proposals assessed. At present, some tentative proposals and development ideas are being studied for the two areas. A major proposal for the Charlestown site is a 26-acre National Historic Park featuring a Museum of Naval Architecture and History, visitors' center, open space, recreation facilities and appropriate services. Land for the park and museum has been conveyed to the Department of the Interior and it is fairly certain that this proposal will become a reality. Other proposals being examined for the Charlestown site include housing, rehabilitation of the granite structure for commercial, water-oriented and other recreational facilities, a medical technology manufacturing and sales center, and various other industrial uses. Possibilities for major shipping activity, construction and repair of major commercial ships, or some type of smaller-scale maritime-related industry or smaller boat facility are also being investigated.



Development notions for the South Boston Naval Annex revolve around the idea of maintaining industrial use of all or most of the site. Due to the character of existing buildings and surrounding noise and height restrictions resulting from flight paths over the area, the site is unsuitable for residential, extensive recreational or commercial uses. Alternatives including heavy industry, such as a refinery complex, power station, or tanker terminal are also viewed as unsuitable, for environmental reasons. Preliminary concepts for reuse of the area center around intensive use by activities such as marine equipment manufacturing, boat building and repair, light manufacturing and assembly, related office space, and an international trade center, including sales and administrative offices, a free trade industrial zone and free port pier.

Preliminary proposals, such as those mentioned above, await the findings of the intensive studies in the next few months. Various problems and potential constraints do exist and must be investigated. Cost of various proposals remains to be determined and, because both sites

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are heavily built up, cost of demolition and utility replacement necessary for new construction may be high. There is uncertainty concerning the exact parcels which will be available for private redevelopment as federal and other public needs for portions of the site have not been finally determined. Although both sites are well situated with respect to the general transportation network there are problems of immediate access and substantial public capital investment may be required to remedy them.

Until the uncertainties and possible constraints are investigated further and more definite proposals developed, it is difficult to speculate on the specific impact potential redevelopment in the Charlestown Navy Yard and the South Boston Annex may have. Investigation and reuse studies so far, however, indicate that the potential impact on Boston's economy and population is very substantial. Preliminary analyses suggest that potential job creation in the two areas may be as high as 15,000-20,000, representing a gross annual payroll of up to \$168 million. Potential for upwards of \$100<sup>M.</sup> of private capital investment exists on the sites and up to \$3.6 million new property tax revenues may be generated for the City as a direct result of Navy Yard redevelopment.

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## NAVY YARD REUSE PROGRAM OVERALL STUDY DESIGN

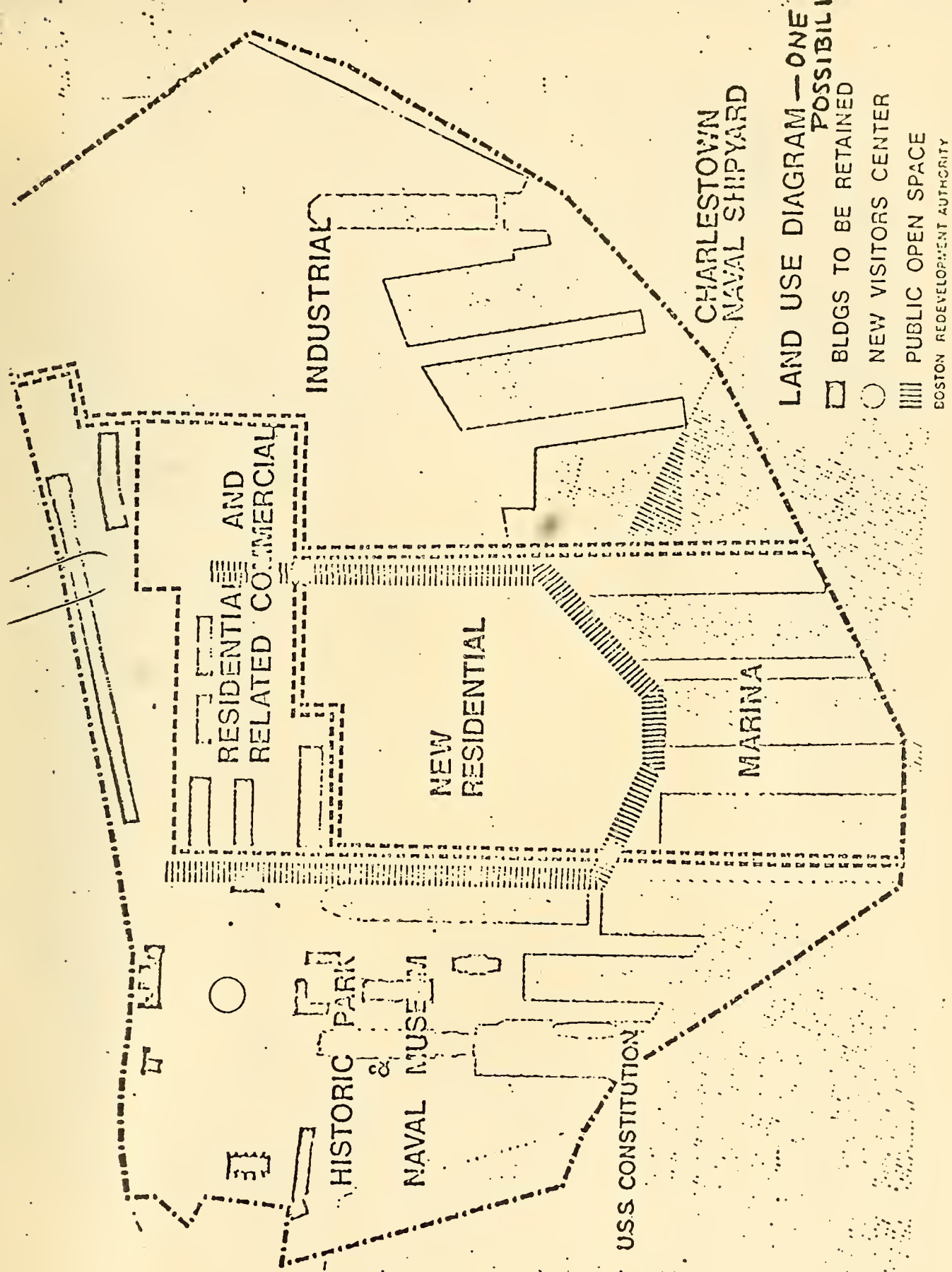
1. Preparation of study design, and detailed work program for base conversion effort.
2. Development of City reuse goals and transformation of goals into criteria for evaluation of reuse programs.
3. Analysis of related projects, proposed, planned, or underway.
4. Analysis of physical facilities and characteristics of the Bases.
5. Determination of community needs, desires, and problems related to base reuse.
6. Preparation of alternative land use plans.
7. Projection of transportation requirements and identification of problem areas.
8. Resolution of transportation problems.
9. City input into national park design process.
10. Evaluation of historic and architectural merit of buildings (primarily in Charlestown).
11. Financial analysis of specific reuse proposals.
12. Environmental impacts of proposed reuses.
13. Analysis of financial implications of base acquisition and reuse (including review GSA acquisition cost).
14. Design of a program to deal with ongoing redevelopment and marketing of naval base properties.
15. Development of planning, architectural, and other controls to assure reuse proposals are carried out in accordance with city plans.
16. Review and modification of existing planning and zoning in the base areas to provide tighter controls if the city does acquire any or all of the base properties.

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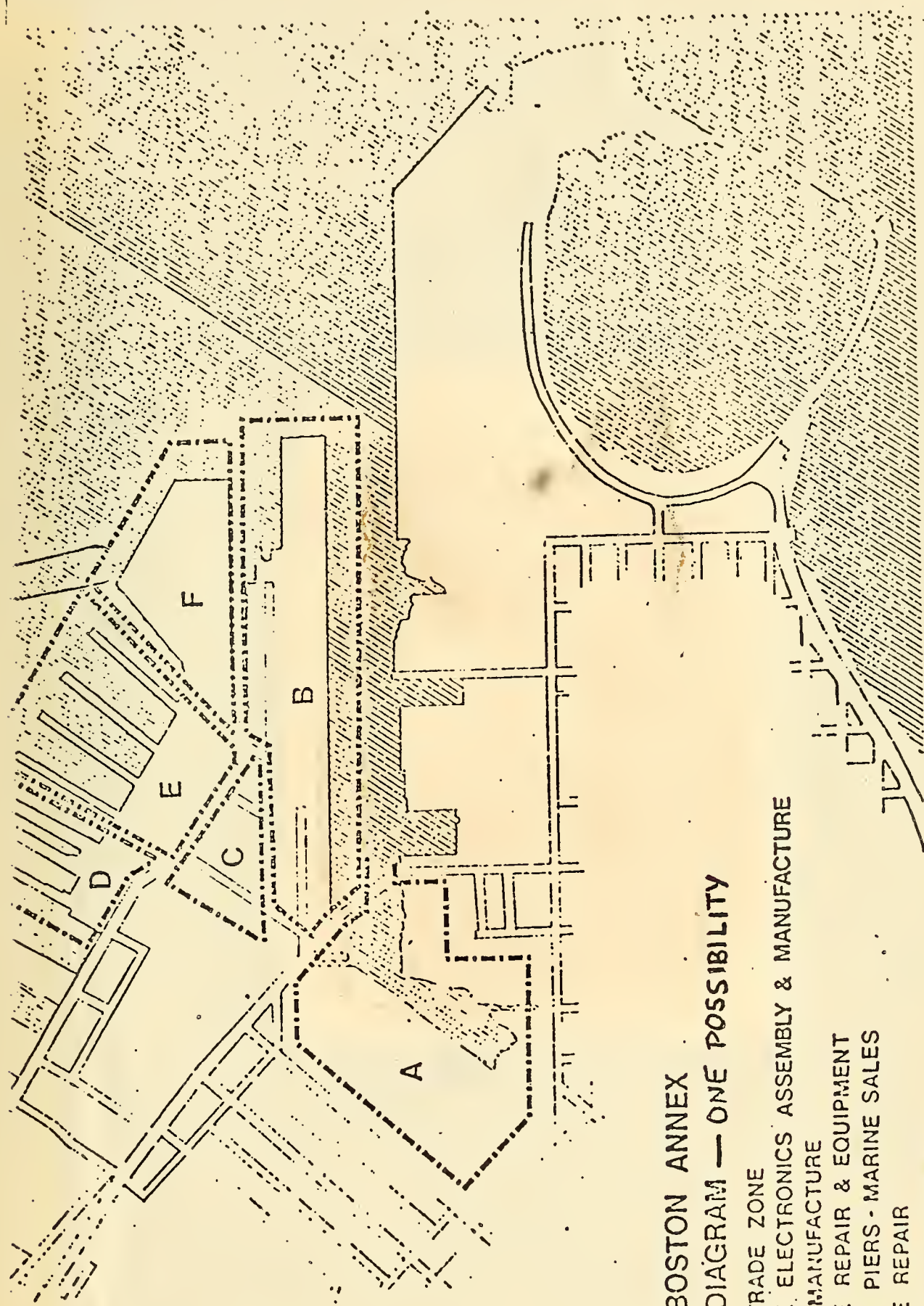
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**SOUTH BOSTON ANNEX  
REUSE DIAGRAM — ONE POSSIBILITY**

- A FREE TRADE ZONE
- B MARINE ELECTRONICS ASSEMBLY & MANUFACTURE
- C LIGHT MANUFACTURE
- D MARINE REPAIR & EQUIPMENT
- E PUBLIC PIERS - MARINE SALES
- F MARINE REPAIR

BOSTON REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

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Background to planning

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